Newspapers by ancestry
https://www.newspapers.com/image/460249940

Downloaded on Mar 25, 2024

Rhythm

A Rash of Rock Books---Acid to Zombies

By Ralph J. Gleason

THE definitive history has yet to be written of jazz after 50 years, so it is no wonder that there does not, as yet, exist a definitive history of rock.

But just as the jazz world has produced a number of books about its music, several of which are serviceable histories which give the novice at least the general outline and some specifics, so it has been with rock.

The jazz history, incidentally, which I generally recommend is Marshall Stearns **"The Jazz Story"** (Mentor paperback). It should be supplemented by Lerol Jones' "Blues People" and a couple of other paperbacks such as Nat Hentoff's "Hear Me Talkin' to Ya" and Jones' "Black Music." Leonard Feather's "Encyclopedia of Jazz" is invaluable for information and contains good short histories and essays, too.

The problem with rock 'n' roll is that although the music has been around for more than 15 years, it wasn't respectable until the New York Times discovered it (some years after The Chronicle). Therefore we are seeing a rash of books without sufficient background. It is similar to what happens to jazz players and rock groups. They are ready and we then audit the process of their education. We shall watch the process in the rock books, too, I expect.

The most useful book in the rock world is Lillian Roxon's **"Encyclopedia of Rock"** (Grosset & Dunlap; $9.95). It is a big fat tome with over

600 pages and hundreds of entries. There is a picture section and a discography but no index, for which the publisher should be fined. There is no table of contents, either; all it is a compilation of groups and subjects arranged alphabetically from acid rock to The Zombies. This takes up 546 pages. Then there is an appendix of Top Albums (Cashbox is the source) from 1960 and Top Singles (also from Cashbox) from 1949 to now. One other list completes the book. It is a roster of Billboard Magazine's Number One best-selling single records each week from January 7, 1950 ("Rudolph the Rednosed Reindeer") to Dec. 30, 1967 (The Beatle's "Hello, Goodbye.").

The Encyclopedia is the only game in town and so, despite its sins of omission, misinterpretation, sloppiness and inadequacy, it is worth having. It was a hopelews task. Now that Miss Roxon has done the ground work, let us hope that either she or someone else comes up with a really thorough job.

Rock Histories

For histories of rock music, there are two: Carl Belz's **"The Story of Rock"** (Oxford; $5.95) and Arnold Shaw's **"The Rock Revolution"** (Crowell Collier; $4.95) Both have some useful information (more detail in Shaw's than is useful) and lot of speculation. Belz is a young professor who digs the music but has an academic approach and the music has not been documented in ordinary channels. One must know when to believe Billboard and when not to. Belz believes

DUKE ELLINGTON continues his engagement at Bimbo's through Saturday.

"Sha Boom" (circa 1954) to be the first rock disc. An interview with the producers of the record, Jerry Wexler and Ahmet Ertegun would have disclosed the fact that the music was called "cat" music then and was the first black music to slop over into the white radio stations in the south.

There's a lot more of this kind of misconception and inadequacy in Belz's book but it is not without interest because of his documentation of most of the past ten years and for his excellent discography, a fine list of records. This volume is, happily, indexed.

Shaw's **"The Rock Revolution"** (now also available in paperback) is divided into geographical and other categories and contains lot of useful information. I find it mucy more valuable for this than for any insights. Shaw is a veteran of the music world, having been a publisher and a recording director as well as a song writer and he knows the business of music very well. Where he loses me is in his evaluations and his explanations.

For the pure pleasure of reading about rock 'n' roll a number of books other than histories or encyclopedias offer something of value: **"Rock and Roll Will Stand"** (Beacon Press; $7.50) is a collection of articles, edited by Greil Marcus, critic for Good Times and Rolling Stone. It is all drawn from material published in those two papers plus an article from the Mojo Navigator, an early rock magazine. The material is uneven; Marcus is by far the most illuminating critic and Sandy Darlington has a charming piece on Country Joe & the Fish. The record reviews seem superfluous now.

Nik Cohn, a British writer, has a book called **"Rock From The Beginning"** (Stein and Day; $5.95) which is provocative at the least. He doesn't dig Dylan which will bug all the Dylan fans (myself included) and he suffers from the same problem that European jazz writers suffer from; He was 3000 miles (at least) away when it all happened. However he's a really sharp writer and his personal reactions which are really all this book contains), are stimulating and may lead one to do something on one's own.

"The Encyclopedia of Folk, Country, and Western Music" (St. Martin's Press; $12.50) is by Irwin Stambler and Grelun Landon, two music business veterans from Los Angeles. It has over 500 entries in the alphabetical section plus several special articles (by Sam Hinton, Ed Kahn and Bill Anderson) covering attitudes, changing times and history plus, a long section including a discography, lists of award winners in various record business and Country Music associations contests.

It is full of interesting, and I think, valuable information. The biographies are well and carefully done and it looks like it is the definitive work of its kind. In any case, whoever does the next one will have to dig in to beat this book. I have already found it quite useful.

The problem with all of this—both the rock books and the enclyopedias — is that the record business is such a swiftly changing one and anything you publish in book form is obsolete before it reaches the stores. Creedence Clearwater Revival, the hottest group of 1969 with three albums on the best-selling charts right now, gets less than a page (less space than an obscure group called The Critters) in Lillian Roxon's Encyclopedia of Rock and there is no listing at all for Doug Kershaw in Seambler and Landon's Encyclopedia of Folk, Country and Western Music. Periodic revision of all of these will be necessary, I am afraid.

As to the history of rock, that subject will be best done, not by someone who grew up listening to it, but by someone involved with it from the beginning who has a background in popular mu-

sic. Only then will we get the flow of events, the important records pinpointed, and the changes and expansions of the field set down properly.

"The Age of Rock" (Vintage; $2.95) is a fat paperback edited by Jonathan Eisen and with an excellent collection of pictures by Elliot Landy. It contains an interesting book in which to browse. It is uneven but most anthologies are. It does offer some fascinating pieces by Stanley Booth, Richard Meltzer, Michael Wood, Frank Kofsky's interview with Zappa, a seminal discussion of groupies by Tom Nolan. I think this anthology, even carrying the weight of my own contribution, will stand the test of time.

I would also like to note the publication by Oak of two reference books.

"Jazz on Record" (Oak; $7.95) is a guide to the first 50 years of the music edited by Albert McCarthy, Max Harrison, Alun Morgan and Paul Oliver. It contains critical comment and biographical information on numerous jazz and blues/jazz artists, plus lists of their best work on disc, as well as a long section consisting of explanatory essays on various subects such as anthologies and arranging, various small specialized companies and other interesting (to the jazz fan) matters.

"Blues Records, 1943-1966" (Oak; $15) is edited by Mike Leadbitter and Neil Slaven and is a remarkably thorough discography of blues for the period listed and an essential guide to the field. As with "Jazz on Record" the editors are British and they have set a standard here which will be hard to equal.

Copyright © 2024 Newspapers.com. All Rights Reserved.
Powered by Newspapers.com